

Rules for Writing for Reacting to the Past

Rule 1: Choose a Clear Purpose and Determine Your Audience

Students struggle with writing. Even professional writers experience “writer’s block”. Usually that’s because we don’t know what we want to say. If you have nothing to say, you cannot write well.

Fortunately, Reacting removes this obstacle. You write to achieve your victory objectives.

Your first task, then, is to decide **which** objective(s) you will address in each writing assignment. Choose **ONE** of your victory objectives and make that the focus of your paper.

Warning: In most Reacting games, you must fulfill multiple objectives. To address them **ALL** in a single short paper is unwise. Do NOT just restate your role sheet.

After selecting your purpose — for example, “I want to punish Socrates” — you must identify your audience. In Reacting, you will likely seek to persuade others — especially the “indeterminate” (undecided) players — to support your objectives: “I’m going to address Athenians who belong to no faction.”

If you are an “indeterminate” player, your writing is of a different character. Your role sheets will usually outline your writing requirements. If you’re unsure of your writing requirements and purposes, ask your Gamemaster/Instructor.

SUMMARY: Rule 1: Decide **what** you want to achieve and **who** you intend to address.

Rule 2: Choose an Appropriate Mode (Usually the Essay)

Different Modes of Writing:

We all use different forms of writing: text messages, emails, diary entries, song lyrics.

For most writing assignments in Reacting, the essay form is best. You cannot do well in Reacting, or in college, without mastering it. But perhaps you can fulfill your purpose and best address your audience (Rule 1) by using a different form of writing. If you want to charge someone with a crime, you might want to write an indictment (“I hereby charge Socrates for the following crimes. . .”). Or perhaps you may wish to defend Socrates with a poem or write a short story about the wonders of his utopian society.

Warning: Do not choose a mode of writing just because it is different. Poetry can be effective in many circumstances, but probably it is ill-adapted to the task of prosecution; and fiction may not be the best way to persuade readers that a real danger lurks around the corner. Humor is

nearly always welcome, but it may not induce readers to take grave action. If you choose an unusual rhetorical form, think about it carefully. Perhaps consult with your instructor.

The Staple: Essay Form

For most purposes in Reacting (and in college), the essay functions as an effective, persuasive, and adaptable mode of writing. Probably the best essay form adheres to a 3-part structure:

The 3-Part Essay Structure: Introduction/Argument/Conclusion

It includes an introduction, which draws the reader into your argument; the body, which states your argument; and a conclusion, which suggests your argument's broader relevance and importance. Here, for example, is an illustrative structure of an essay attacking Socrates for inventing "new" gods:

Introduction as Invitation:	The gods control our destiny, and that of Athens;
Body (Section 1)	Socrates offends the gods by criticizing their actions;
Body (Section 2)	Socrates offends the gods by inventing new ones;
Body (Sections 3 . . .)	etc.
Conclusion as Enlargement:	By offending the gods that control our destiny, Socrates endangers Athens. He should be stopped.

This structure works for most purposes. It imparts movement and direction to your argument and suggests its broader relevance.

More on Introductions

Rule 1 obliges you to connect with your audience. The introduction is your way of doing this. Assume that your audience — like most people — are worried about other things — being fired or dumped by a partner. The introduction serves to catch their attention and draw them into your subject.

More on Conclusions

While the introductory paragraph should reach out and grab your reader, and the body of your writing lay out your argument, the conclusion should show the reader that she has learned something valuable. Perhaps your conclusion will refer to your introduction.

Summary Rule 2: Assume that your writing will be in the three-part essay form (introduction, body, conclusion) but consider other options. Engage your writer at the outset (introduction); conclude broadly.

Rule 3: Do Research!

In Reacting, you write to persuade your reader, but this requires you to provide ideas and facts to support your argument. You must research your topic! You need additional ideas and information. Read the historical context essay in the gamebook and accompanying primary texts. You may also wish to consult other sources. **You must do research!**

Remember that the gamebook includes additional sources. Your instructor may have ideas, too.

At the end of your written work, you should include an endnote or a statement indicating your sources. Quotes or controversial statements should include a source to show that you have not just made up those materials.

SPECIAL NOTE: Whenever possible, read the papers of other students and cite them in YOUR work. Challenge the facts and refute the arguments of those who are against “your” positions.

Summary Rule 3: Do research! Don’t summarize your role sheet!

Rule 4: Coherence and Structure

To write well, you must remember two things about structure:

- 1) Every paragraph should convey a single idea, and every sentence in that paragraph should relate to that idea;
- 2) Your paragraphs/ideas should be grouped in logical order: use an **Argument Style Outline**

Topical Style Outline

Often high school teachers require use of a “topical” outline, which lists all of the topics your paper will “cover”. For an essay on “What I Did Last Summer,” for example, your topical outline might organize your work by topic:

Introductory Paragraph: “I did lots of things last summer.”

Body Paragraph 1) I worked at a fast-food restaurant (plus details)

Body Paragraph 2) I met a new friend (plus details);

Body Paragraph 3) I took a trip to the beach (plus details).

The problem with topical outlines is that they fail to say much. In Reacting, you won’t be writing “about” something; you will be advancing an argument. That’s why you should use an Argument-Style Outline.

Argument Style Outline

After deciding your purpose and audience (rule 1), choosing your writing mode (rule 2) [probably an essay], and gathering your research notes (rule 3), organize your paper to advance an argument. For example, instead of writing a boring paper entitled, “What I Did Last Summer,” you may decide to advance an interesting argument: “My Summer Was a Bore!”

Introductory Paragraph: “Some say summer vacations are fun, but that is not always true”

Body Paragraph 1: My fast-food job was boring (in the following ways...)

Body Paragraph 2: My beach trip resulted in sunburn and indigestion...

Body Paragraph 3: My new friendships went nowhere...

Conclusion: “My summer vacation was boring: wasn’t yours boring, too?”

This “argument-style” outline makes your paper easier to write. In Body Paragraph 1, for example, you should omit irrelevant details about your job: only include those that pertained to its “boring-ness”.

But what about interesting observations that don’t fit your argument? For example: What about the famous rapper you spotted at the beach? In general, omit irrelevant material. If an “interesting detail” does not advance your argument, it does not belong in your paper.

Summary Rule 4: One idea (only) for every paragraph, and use an argument-style outline to group your paragraphs.

EXCEPTIONS TO THESE RULES: A Final Note

If you adhere to these (and other) “rules,” your writing will gain force and effectiveness.

But remember that rules—even these--sometimes inhibit creativity: truly, all rules are meant to be broken. But before you adopt an unusual genre, shatter the grammar of a sentence, or employ mixed metaphors, make sure you are doing so consciously, and for a good purpose.

Additional Considerations

The above rules are tips for writing a good paper for reacting. However, I will not only be looking at whether you fulfill those rules when I grade your paper. I will also be looking at the following areas:

1. Did you demonstrate your understanding of the historical context of the game? Did any claims you made about the period ring true?
2. Did you demonstrate engagement with your role in the game? Did what you wrote seem reasonable for character in this historical situation?

3. Did you follow the instructions given for the paper? **(Warning: This is where many students go awry. I do expect you to write the paper you are asked to write.)**

Grading Table for Writing in Reacting:

CATEGORY	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO! NEEDS WORK HERE	Not Applicable
Advisory 1: Purpose and Audience				
Does the essay have a clear purpose?				
Does it address an audience?				
Advisory 2: Appropriate Writing Mode				
Is the form of writing suited to its purpose and audience? (Usually an essay)				
If an essay, does the introduction draw the reader into the subject?				
If an essay, does the conclusion broaden into a larger subject or refer back to the introduction?				
Advisory 3: Research!				
Are the arguments supported with facts and research?				
Did the writer anticipate and rebut counter arguments?				
Did the writer refer to other student papers in the class (if available and relevant)?				
Advisory 4: Coherence and Structure				
Does every paragraph convey a single idea?				

Do the main ideas of the essay follow each other in a logical way?				
Other considerations				
Did the paper demonstrate an understanding of historical context?				
Did the paper demonstrate engagement with the game role?				
Did the paper follow any special instructions for the paper?				
Did the paper meet length requirements?				